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# Speak English, Pray in Spanish: Forming Cultural Bridges between Hispanic Teens and Parents

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*Speak English, Pray in Spanish: Forming Cultural Bridges between Hispanic Teens and Parents*

A Pastoral Synthesis Project by

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### Abstract

Within Hispanic families there is a growing gap – a disconnection between Hispanic immigrants and their U.S. born and raised children. The cultural gap formed between these two groups has caused many U.S. Hispanic teens to disconnect from “Catholic” as a marker of identity. In order to help Hispanic teens establish a Catholic identity, the local church community needs to help families bridge the gap between teens, parents, and the Church itself. Through the exploration of *mestizaje* and the incorporation of *lo cotidiano* and accompaniment in *catequesis familiar*, parents in conjunction with the Church community can help engage teens in Church life. By creating a space for parents and another for their teens, each will receive sound faith formation relevant to their respective realities. Parents will gather to learn about their teens’ Catholic identity and how to help their teens embrace it, while their teens meet separately to learn more about their faith in a space they feel comfortable created *for* them. Thus, a holistic approach that addresses each group’s needs may lead to genuine involvement and understanding.

## **I. Case Component**

Adolescents who are not connecting to their Hispanic Catholic faith lose part of their identity. For most Hispanics, faith is part of one's identity. It is a tradition that has been inherited from ancestors that is too precious to let die. By not taking action to raise awareness, the larger Church may be at risk of losing its Hispanic youth in the U.S. The Church risks a double tragedy by losing connection with families (parents and teens) to practice the Catholic faith as a community. Not only would Hispanics lose part of their religious and cultural identity, but the Church itself would lose the richness Hispanic families offer as a family. The Church is growing in the U.S. not because of Anglo believers, but primarily because of Hispanic Catholics who migrate with deep religious roots. For both (them and the Church), jeopardizing this bond between them would be disastrous.

The disconnection of young Hispanic teens and children from the Catholic faith is in great part due to their parents' efforts at faith formation. Whether the parents are involved in parish activities or only attend mass once a week, some of the Hispanic adolescents do not participate in their faith. The scenario below is an example of the issue of disconnected faith among Hispanic youth and the lack of adult leadership to foster sound formation for teens.

I have noticed several parishes encounter the issue of having minors mingling outside the parish while mass is celebrated or during meetings and/or classes where adults are gathered. Even though this issue occurs at different locations, I will only focus on my own parish. For the sake of its parishioners, the name of the parish discussed in this paper has been changed.

A typical gathering includes adults in a room first listening to someone preach and then socializing with each other, while their children are taken to another room. The younger children are divided into several groups and different group members look after them. In my observations, this seems to be a common factor among the apostolic movements during their group gatherings.

“Members of these groups [such as apostolic movements] engage in common prayer, faith formation, and evangelization activities, often in smaller-sized communities that foster a stronger sense of commitment and belonging than many large parish congregations.”<sup>1</sup> At times, if younger children do not want to go to the groups, their siblings who are minors will look after them. Teens are often outside chatting with their peers, with their headphones, and/or busy with their phones or other electronic gadgets. In some cases, if the teens are in the same room as their parents, they are either in the back of the room on their phones or talking to their peers. At times, I have asked some of the teens why they are outside and not inside with their parents. Or why they do not attend the groups provided by the group. The most common answer from these teens is, “The meeting is boring.” They also say the meeting and/or class is meant for their parents. Another common response is the time of the group gathering is the time to see their friends and peers from church during the week since they do not see them because they either attend different schools or live far from each other.

Even though there are adults who are willing to hold catechetical seminars during the time of the meeting, the reality is that the teens are in a daycare instead of relevant adolescent faith formation. The parents are involved in their group and most likely in other parish activities as well. However, despite their involvement, their children are not in the same room as they are or do not have any interest joining the group for teens. Again, there is no sense of connection between the teen and the formation being provided to the parents. There are gaps between Hispanic first generation immigrant parents and their U.S. born children. Each group has a different reality, culture, and Catholic identity. Parents want to instill their same Catholic identity to their children not realizing their children have a different faith than them. U.S. born children

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy M. Matovina, *Latino Catholicism: Transformation in America's Largest Church* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012), 98-99.

live in two cultures – the one at home and the other of their social life with peers. Children’s everyday life is a shift between the two worlds.

### **Other Issues**

The fact we have minors “hanging” outside instead of participating where people are gathered shows partly they do not want to be there. If they don’t want to be there, it might be due to a lack of interest from them as they may see the activities and formation as irrelevant to them. In addition, if the parents are participating in one thing, but their children are not, and their children are implicitly being alienated, then the parents are not taking action on their children’s faith formation. Opportunities are being lost to connect our youth, and the church of generations to come by a lack of attention and the failure to do anything about it.

### **Other Considerations**

A number of these families are low income; therefore, we have families where both parents work, and the children might see less of one parent or both because of their work. These families have one or even two jobs. In addition to our youth’s culture, parents continue to instill the culture they are used to from their own parents. This includes giving responsibilities to young children as if they were adults. For example, usually the older children are given the responsibility to look after the younger ones, and when the children reach an age where they can work the money earned is used to help support the family’s needs. Although this not unique to the Latino community it is prevalent in the St. Teresa community.

Seeing one parent more than the other or one having adult responsibilities such as supporting the family financially or taking care of younger siblings are some of the realities among families at St. Theresa that demonstrate how parents are not in tune with the culture of their children.

## What Is at Risk?

In terms of the efforts of Hispanic immigrant parents to enforce their own Catholic identity to their children, the result is often the opposite; since the parents have a different reality than their children, the Catholic identities differ from one generation to the next. The disconnection between parents, teens and the Catholic faith leads teens to distance themselves from their faith. In the next section I will discuss statistics about the cultural gaps between cultural characteristics of teens and parents, and why it is necessary to pay attention to such gaps and cultural differences between both groups.

## II. Context Component

“The higher the number of Hispanic Catholics attending Mass in a parish, the more likely they are to attend Mass in Spanish.”<sup>2</sup> While this may be true among adults, this is not necessarily true among the younger Hispanic generation. “Pastoral outreach to Hispanic youth, particularly U.S. born Hispanics, is minimal in parishes (and dioceses) compared to the size of this population. Lack of appropriate investment in ministry with this population at a time when most young Catholics in the country are Hispanic is self-defeating.”<sup>3</sup> For Catholics, the baptismal call is to be inclusive of all Christians. According to the U.S. bishops’ document on lay ministry, the baptismal call commands “that all Christians in whatever state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity, and this holiness is conducive to a more human way of living even in society here on earth.”<sup>4</sup>

How then do we facilitate this fullness of Christian life for younger Hispanics? I propose the answer lies in faith formation for parents. Parents are the key in helping today’s teens to have an encounter with their faith. In the following segments, I will describe 1) the cultural

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<sup>2</sup> Hosffman Ospino, *Hispanic Ministry in Catholic Parishes: A Summary Report of Findings from the National Study of Catholic Parishes with Hispanic Ministry* (Boston: Boston College, 2014), 15.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>4</sup> *Co-workers in the Vineyard of the Lord: A Resource for Guiding the Development of Lay Ecclesial Ministry* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005), 7.

characteristics of the relationship between Hispanic parents, teens and the church; and 2) examples of the social realities of Hispanic teens living simultaneously in two cultures.

### **Cultural Context**

Before continuing, it is important to see the parents' experience of their migration. According to authors Leah Rubio and Adilia McManus Keila Garcia, a variety of reasons have led couples to leave their country. Living in a foreign country represents challenges such as learning a different language and adapting to a new culture; yet the biggest challenge of all is raising children in a culture different than the parents' while, at the same time, not forgetting their Latin roots and traditions.<sup>5</sup> "Among people who immigrate or are exiled from their home, a 'trauma of geographical location' is due to a significant change."<sup>6</sup> Relocating requires a process of mourning a major change, because it is significant. "Every major move alters both the human and nonhuman components in our environment which are densely intertwined. When we leave a place, we lose ties not only with friends and relatives but also with familiar nonhuman environment."<sup>7</sup> First generation parents might have left everything in their respective homelands; however, they bring and hold on to their culture and faith because it may be all they have.

### **Gaps between Teens and Parents**

In the midst of adapting to a new world, parents try to feed their personal spirituality to fill personal voids; consequently, parents may easily forget the needs of their children and drag them with them along. The problem is that the parents' spiritual journey is extraneous to their children. The spiritual journey of the parents should be separate from that of their children. "The acculturation gap hypothesis states that, because immigrant children and their parents acculturate

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<sup>5</sup> Leah Rubio and Adilia McManus Keila Garcia, "Trabajando como equipo para criar hijos en otra cultura," *National Healthy Marriage Resource Center*, accessed June 14, 2015, <http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/resource-detail/index.aspx?rid=3730>

<sup>6</sup> Salman Akhtar, *Immigration and Acculturation: Mourning, Adaptation, and the Next Generation*. (Lanham, Md: Jason Aronson, 2011), 3.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.



at different rates, acculturation gaps emerge between them.... parents are more acculturated to the heritage culture than their children, and children are more acculturated to the host culture...Dissonance or gaps between parents and children predict adolescent adjustment, family conflict or parenting difficulties.”<sup>8</sup>

It is understandable for adults to look for a connection to their faith; it is part of their human needs. Immigrant parents look for a place where they can belong, often adapting to a community they can be part of. “Stephen Warner emphasizes how migrants renegotiate their religious and cultural identities upon arrival in the United States in response to the particular cultural and institutional environment they encounter.”<sup>9</sup> Counter to this argument however, I have observed the parents in St. Teresa church cling to their original religious and cultural identity. They will hold on to it as much as they can. Some of the parents have even integrated that culture into the ministries available in the parish, thereby shaping the ministry itself without themselves experiencing any change. The move toward of self-fulfillment continues. Whether the parents are involved in one or a number of parish ministries, they search for what exists in relation to their own Catholic identity even going so far as adapting the existing ministries to their own vision.

An example of the integration of parents into the parish is the adaptation to apostolic movements, such as Jóvenes Para Cristo (JPC). According to JPC’s website, their mission is to announce the Good News to all people through a formation process that seeks to be integral, continuous, and systematic.<sup>10</sup> JPC and other similar ministries relate to immigrant Hispanic adults because most of their leaders *are* immigrant Hispanic adults. Yet, the personal stories

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<sup>8</sup> Dina Birman and Meredith Poff. "Intergenerational Differences in Acculturation," *Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development*, Immigration (2011): 1-7, accessed Jun 5, 2015, <http://www.child-encyclopedia.com/immigration/according-experts/intergenerational-differences-acculturation>

<sup>9</sup> Brett C. Hoover, *The Shared Parish* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), Kindle Edition, Kindle Locations 2856-2858.

<sup>10</sup> “Misión,” Asociación Jóvenes Para Cristo/Young Adults for Christ, accessed June 2, 2015, <http://www.ajpc.org/nosotros/mision.htm>

shared in JPC meetings (and in other ministries that follow this pattern) are not geared to the children born in the U.S. because the stories shared are not the teens' stories, they are their parents'. For example, I have been in meetings and faith formation classes where the examples used deal with relocation or suffering such as the exile of the Israelites in Egypt. The Exodus speaks to the mourning of parents in leaving their homes, but most teens will not understand the context and will not relate.

In short, we have families with multiple cultures. In order to have strong faith communities, values need to be instilled instead of passing on customs.<sup>11</sup> Hispanic parents keep their faith and practice it as they remember doing with their parents. For example, they may follow their tradition as they have a minimal *religious education* – they have deep faith, little academic or biblical knowledge. However, their children do not follow the same pattern because it is not the same Catholic identity. Consequently, by parents trying to enforce their idea of their own faith to their children, parents lose the opportunity to pass a strong and rich faith to them. By one group following a tradition, and the other feeling alienated from this same tradition, neither of the groups form a real connection to a deeper, personal, as well as a communal, faith. Moreover, a number of parents' idea of faith is overly simplistic, which creates difficulty for them to explain and pass it to their children, because they don't know how.<sup>12</sup>

### **Culture and Faith**

The continued growth in the parish Hispanic community speaks to a deep connection between culture and faith. "Parishes continue to be privileged places where most active Catholics learn, live, and celebrate their faith. Such is a hallmark of the communal identity at the heart of Catholicism, an experience very close to the Hispanic cultural ethos. Parishes play an important

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<sup>11</sup> Olivia Cornejo, interview by Dulce M. Flores, Garden Grove, June 2, 2015.

<sup>12</sup> Olivia Cornejo, interview.

role in the lives of millions of Hispanic Catholics.”<sup>13</sup> While this may be true, at St. Teresa, parents have not passed the concept of embracing and belonging to a parish or community to their children. Parents have developed a *parish-belonging-attitude* as a way to adapt to a new environment due to their longing for their home countries. As previously mentioned, because parents are in a new environment, they find ways to cope with change by trying to adapt to their new surroundings and do so by finding commonality within their new community to their old country. Teens in the U.S. however have a different reality—they are surrounded by multiple traditions and cultures (other than Hispanic), so it is important that parents speak to *that* reality and not be stuck in the memory of the *home-country*.

“Spanish-speaking Catholics actively involved in [parish] communities are largely immigrants. The use of Spanish, nonetheless, is not exclusive of Hispanics who are not immigrants and/or may prefer English as their everyday language. As the U.S.-born Hispanic Catholic population increases, parishes with Hispanic ministry may need to expand services in both languages and shift resources to emerging priorities.”<sup>14</sup> Most teens hold English as their primary language, and their parents’ as Spanish.

One reason why parishes may not be targeting Hispanic teens is a lack of leadership, as is the case with St. Teresa. Challenges among pastoral leaders in doing Hispanic youth ministry at the parish level include “minimal or no interest in church-related activities on the part of Hispanic youth and their families; dire socio-economic circumstances (e.g., poverty, violence, lack of access to good education, addiction) within which young Hispanics must constantly negotiate survival every day, thus rendering organized religion at the bottom of their priorities,[and] lack of resources to invest in ministerial programs that truly connect with the

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<sup>13</sup> Hosffman Ospino, *Hispanic Ministry in Catholic Parishes*, 5.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

reality and interests of Hispanic Catholic youth.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, in St. Teresa especially, there is a lack of properly trained individuals that might engage with parents and teens in faith formation rather than viewing it as just another form of “baby-sitting.”

### **Culture and Church**

“Most pastoral leaders overseeing Hispanic ministry observe that integration into the life of the parish among Hispanic Catholics of all ages – immigrants and U.S. born – remains at minimal level. Parishes must engage in serious discernment with all their members...about building communities where all their members find themselves at home.”<sup>16</sup> It is important for the parents to take action to voice the needs of their children in their parish if nothing is being offered to them. However, in order for parents to voice their children’s needs, parents must know what those needs are. “There are now approximately 56 million religiously unaffiliated adults in the U.S., and this group – sometimes called religious ‘nones’ – is more numerous than either Catholics or mainline Protestants, according to the new survey.”<sup>17</sup> If there are adults in this category as “nones,” it’s a possibility teens of today may head in that direction. According to the U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, higher percentages point to younger generations among those who consider themselves unaffiliated. In 2014, ages 18 to 29 showed 35 percent to be unaffiliated, while only 9 percent showed to be unaffiliated among older generations, ages 65 and over.<sup>18</sup> Compared to findings from 2007, 2014 shows an increment of becoming more unaffiliated among younger generations; and it may continue to increase if nothing is done.

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<sup>15</sup> Hosffman Ospino, *Hispanic Ministry in Catholic Parishes*, 36.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 42.

<sup>17</sup> “America’s Changing Religious Landscape,” *Pew Research Center*, May 12 2015, accessed May 24, 2015, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>

<sup>18</sup> “Unaffiliated (religious “nones”),” *Pew Research Center*, accessed 14 June 15, 2015, <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-tradition/unaffiliated-religious-nones/>

While observing the Hispanic teen group at St. Teresa, I found that some teens do not agree with their parents' faith, as they do not consider it to be their own.<sup>19</sup> For example (as previously mentioned in section I), when teens attend their parents' faith formation in their apostolic movement group, teens find it boring and irrelevant.<sup>20</sup>

Looking back to the results of the 2014 Religious Landscape Study, 20 percent of Hispanics identify as religiously unaffiliated.<sup>21</sup> Even though Hispanics are a large minority, it is important to notice those from the community who do not consider themselves to be affiliated with a religion. The number of people who do not feel connected to their faith may be small at the moment, yet the goal is not for the community to support the parish (in numbers), but for the community to feel supported by its parish and connected to it on a personal level. Church leadership needs to intercede and aid in creating and being a bridge between teens and parents.

### **Social Context**

Most of the teens in the parish have parents who are immigrants from Mexico, Central America, and South America. Most parents are not fully bilingual and speak mostly Spanish to their children. One of the terms I have heard from parents in these situations is that their *children speak English, but pray in Spanish*. I find this true because Hispanic children (mainly from first generation parents) navigate in two worlds every day. Therefore, parents and the church leadership need to acknowledge that Hispanic children have a different reality. For example, teens who have lived the majority of their life in the U.S. deal with a constant shift between two worlds – the outside English world and the home Spanish world. At home, they speak Spanish, while most of the day (and week) is spent speaking in English at school and the outside world. They speak English with their peers, teachers, coaches, and counselors. When they go to the

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<sup>19</sup> St. Teresa Catholic Church, Adolescentes: Fe y Esperanza, observation by Dulce M. Castro, October 24, 2014.

<sup>20</sup> St. Teresa Catholic Church, Adolescentes: Fe y Esperanza, observation by Dulce M. Castro, October 10, 2014.

<sup>21</sup> "America's Changing Religious Landscape."

store or any other place, they communicate in English, because it's the dominant language. However, at home and church, parents expect them to speak Spanish.

Most parents enroll their children in sacramental preparation in Spanish (i.e. First Communion), and expect them to learn the prayers in Spanish. However, it is not only the language teens deal with. Teens are in a situation where their identity is at risk because they are neither fully from the U.S. and not fully from the country their parents are natives of. Family members and friends in their parents' country might see them belonging to the US. On the contrary, people in the U.S., especially in dominant cultures in the Anglo communities, might see Hispanic teens as the "other"- not of the U.S. and belonging to their parents' country. For example, teens are categorized for their ethnicity and treated as a foreigner due to their physical appearance, name, or accent. Furthermore, parents do not differentiate between their children's ethnicity and their culture. Parents feel and believe that by continuing to speak Spanish to their children, and involve them in "faith formation programs" in Spanish, the children will not lose their ethnic background. While this is an important factor to consider, it is exceptionally broad to discuss in detail in this paper. I will discuss more about how it is problematic for the teens' faith journey in section IV. When parents do not see the needs within the children's culture, they also do not see their children's identity as U.S. born Hispanics.

### **A Third Culture**

Hispanic teens deal with their own culture. Their culture, at times, dictates opposite messages to what the parents say. For example, today's youth deal more with individualism, thus becoming more the generation of the "I." They are bombarded with messages from social media, peers, advertisements, and others to be independent, to have the latest technology, and to set goals for themselves. On the other hand, parents instill values of community and family. When Hispanic youth receive mixed messages, it's understandable to see how they do not connect to

their parents' faith. Therefore, it is crucial for parents to be aware of their children's culture to better guide them, especially when it comes to passing and keeping traditions to younger generations. Knowing the teens' culture helps parents communicate better with their children. Catholics are people of community. Traditions are important in the Catholic faith.

If Hispanic children lose their sense of identity as Hispanic-Catholics, they may become another statistic as the "nones." The baptized, as a representative of the larger Church, need to respond to the baptismal call to announce the Good News to others and be inclusive. By not taking action with teens, the baptized are not *loving thy neighbor*. They are allowing teens to be alienated from also receiving the Good News.

In my experience, I also lived in two worlds as a teen. I also spoke English and prayed in Spanish. I actually continue to do so. Yet, at some time in my life, my parents allowed me to search for *my* Catholic identity. As children and in our teen years, my parents would take my siblings and me to mass in Spanish. Even though my siblings were English language dominant (more so than I), we were taken to Mass in Spanish and expected to know the prayers in Spanish. It was a way for us to preserve and connect to our ethnic background. As adults, however, we each began to attend mass in English when we could drive ourselves there. My siblings and I searched our own Catholic identity. In order for teens to find their Catholic identity, their parents need to become aware of their needs, and therefore become bridges of faith. In order to help the community, the parish needs to pay attention to parents and help with passing on the faith to younger generations. In the next section I will talk about how Catholic tradition supports bridging gaps, and how the lack of support to bridge building is due to lack of leadership and structures.

### III. Theological Component

According to the *Code of Canon Law* c. 774 concerning catechetical instruction, “Under the direction of legitimate ecclesiastical authority, solicitude for catechesis belongs to all members of the Church according to each one’s role. Parents above others are obliged to form their children by word and example in faith and in the practice of Christian life; sponsors and those who take the place of parents are bound by an equal obligation.”<sup>22</sup> Parents are the providers and first teachers to their children at home; therefore, it is the parents who are responsible for their children’s formation overall. As they attend to formation, Hispanic Catholic immigrant families in the United States face a diversity of cultures and beliefs within the families themselves. First generation Hispanic parents deal with a different reality than those who are not immigrants. Such parents cope with obstacles that impede them to provide effective and profound catechesis to their children.

The information that will be discussed is in observation of first generation immigrant Hispanic parents involved in St. Teresa Catholic Church dealing with conflicts about their perceptions of faith compared to those of their teenage children who were born and/or raised in the U.S. Within these two groups (parents and children), there is a gap between each’s Catholic identities. As a representative of the Universal Church, the parish, is needed to answer the needs of Hispanic immigrant families, that is 1) to provide the proper faith formation to the parents to understand their baptismal call to live and share the gospel, 2) in order to help their children do the same, and 3) to help their children embrace their faith through their *mestizaje*. This section will explore theological components that deal with cultural problems that create gaps between parents and teens such as the realm of the teens’ *mestizaje* (multiple belonging) as Mexican-

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<sup>22</sup> *Code of Canon Law*, c. 774, accessed June 5, 2015, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/\\_P2K.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/_P2K.HTM).



Americans; the responsibilities of church leadership as support for faith formation; and the responsibilities of the parents as catechists.

### **Mestizaje of the Mexican-Americans**

Latino/a theologian Carmen Nanko-Fernández speaks, in her book *Theologizing en Espanglish*, about the term hybridity, indicating a multi-belonging of peoples.<sup>23</sup> As discussed in section II (Social Context), Hispanic U.S. born/raised teens are in constant shifts between two worlds – the outside English world and the home Spanish world. This particular group belongs to more than one world; therefore, it is a group of multiple belonging. For example, both of my siblings consider themselves Mexican and North American - they belong to two different cultures simultaneously. They are Hispanic because our parents are first generation immigrants from Mexico, and they are North American because they were born and raised in the U.S.

Hybridity is shared among Latino/a people by their speaking Spanish. For example, in the U.S., Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, South and Central American peoples share Spanish as their primary language. Many also share the same religious affiliation (i.e. Catholic, Protestant, Christian, etc.). Hispanic-U.S. born teens are a new cultural hybridity. They are Hispanics whose dominant language is English, yet their ethnicity is better expressed in Spanish.

Theologian Virgilio Elizondo presents the term *mestizaje* in his book *The Future is Mestizo* to express the idea of the multiple belonging of Latinos living in the U.S. Elizondo expresses his dual belonging as a Mexican-American living in the U.S., which led him to embrace his two worlds. “Affirmation of the lived transcultural experience of Latino/a *mestizaje*...involved relentless inner and outer struggle...[requiring] a strong resolution to transcend menacing existential, political, cultural and even geographic borders in order to

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<sup>23</sup> Carmen Nanko-Fernandez, *Theologizing en Espanglish* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), Kindle Edition, Kindle Locations 513-514.

survive sanely and wholly in the United States.”<sup>24</sup> In the case of Mexican-Americans, they are not fully Mexican and not fully *American*. They are *Ni de aquí, ni de allá*— a popular saying translated as *neither from here nor there*. This, however, is more profound; it is a concept well known within the Hispanic culture because it continues to be relevant among the people. Whoever expresses the saying refers to someone who does not feel he or she belongs to any culture.

The term “Mexican-Americans” are not people from Mexico. Whether they are indigenous to the Southwest (many are) or have been brought up in other parts of the U.S., there is a continuity with their Mexican past, but there are also cultural and linguistic differences. In Mexico they are not accepted as “regular” Mexicans... Their Spanish is ridiculed and they are considered inferior.<sup>25</sup>

Although not all teens have the same cultural, i.e., not all are Mexicans, the issue of rejection is the same due to a multiple belonging. They are seen as a hybrid kind; therefore, they are not 100 percent Mexican, Guatemalan, Salvadorian, et cetera.

*Mestizaje* among U.S. Latinos encompasses a cultural hybridity which also takes into account “the influence of cultural traditions and life experiences in the United States.”<sup>26</sup> In the case of St. Teresa, Hispanic teens are taught to choose and shift between the culture at home and the culture outside of home. In their daily life, “Latinos move back and forth from cultural citizenship and from one identity to another.”<sup>27</sup> In my own life, I too have needed to shift between the outside world and the home world. The constant shift was frustrating. My parents moved my siblings and me to several schools. My first three years in grade school were completed in the U.S. Then I completed the remaining years in Mexico. My Middle school and high school years I completed in the U.S. again. I literally shifted between cultures. When my

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<sup>24</sup> Benjamin Valentin, *Mapping Public Theology: Beyond Culture, Identity, and Difference* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2002), 47.

<sup>25</sup> Virgilio P. Elizondo, *Galilean Journey: The Mexican-American Promise* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 21.

<sup>26</sup> Valentin, *Mapping Public Theology*, 47.

<sup>27</sup> William V. Flores and Rina Benmayor, *Latino Cultural Citizenship: Claiming Identity, Space, and Rights* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1997), 46.

family finally settled in the U.S., I was used to change (as well my siblings), but it was exhausting for me. In my time in Mexico, my siblings and I were not considered fully Mexican. Our family who lived in Mexico saw my siblings as *Americans*, and not Mexicans because they knew they were born in the U.S. And they saw me as someone who lost her *Mexicanness* by living in the U.S. several years.

Because I moved from one country to another, as a child and then as a teenager, in the U.S. I was put in remedial English classes to learn the language. In Mexico, I worked with a tutor to also *catch up* with my peers and teachers because I needed to familiarize myself with the Mexican culture, its history, and its language. I think I felt the rejection more than my siblings, as I am the oldest, of not being accepted by own Mexican family and not accepted by the dominant culture. My parents did not foresee the consequences of us moving; they only acted as they thought was best at the time. Other Mexican-Americans may not have the same situation as mine; however, we are kin because we still continue to go through a dynamic of rejection and acceptance between cultures. Since a number of immigrant parents are focused (whether they are aware or not) on fulfilling their own Catholic identity, they neglect to see their children's *mestizaje*, and the need for their children to fulfill their own Catholic identity.

As previously mentioned, the Catholic faith taught by parents deals with issues that are foreign to the teens. "A number of young Latinas and Latinos perceive their elders' faith as too entwined with suffering, too connected to a bygone immigrant homeland, too focused on strict obedience to authority, too simplistic to address the realities of contemporary life, or simply irrelevant to the concerns of a new generation."<sup>28</sup> While parents continue to adapt to their geographical relocation, the teens skip that process of adaptation since they are already home. On the other hand, teens continue to struggle for approval in their own home as "Mexican-

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<sup>28</sup> Matovina, *Latino Catholicism*, 220.

Americans have not been accepted within North American society... considered second-class citizens.”<sup>29</sup> In addition, “Latinos have at times been deemed inadequate as people who do not belong, and inherently as a problem people.”<sup>30</sup>

Elizondo explores Jesus’ *mestizaje* as a Galilean and a Jew in his book *Galilean Journey*. “The ultimate intention of Elizondo’s tracing of Jesus’ sociocultural identity is to draw an analogy between it and the Mexican American mestizo/a experience.”<sup>31</sup> In relation to Jesus, Hispanic teens live a similar experience as he did. They live in two cultures and speak the respective language for each. “For some, especially in the younger generations, Spanglish offers a voice that holds in creative tension the multiple dimensions of hybrid identities. This linguistic border crossing, or code switching, occurs often in the same sentence.”<sup>32</sup> This linguistic method is part of their culture, which should be a medium for the Church and the parents to use as part of faith formation. The following example of my friend Arturo illustrates the way Hispanic youth use language. Arturo is the youngest of four siblings, born in the U.S., but his parents emigrated from Mexico. Arturo was a student in the classroom when I helped as a volunteer assistant to catechists at St. Teresa. Even though Arturo’s siblings have a similar story, I will only focus on Arturo’s experience.

Arturo used to speak mostly English and had difficulty expressing himself in Spanish. In school he only spoke most of the day in English to his friends, siblings, and teachers; however, he spoke in his broken Spanish to his parents, some catechists at church, and people he knew who only spoke Spanish. Since Arturo was enrolled in First Communion preparation in Spanish, most of his formation was taught in Spanish and he was required to learn the prayers in Spanish – which he learned. His use of English and Spanish though, helped him express himself better

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<sup>29</sup> Elizondo, *Galilean Journey*, 22.

<sup>30</sup> Valentin, *Mapping Public Theology*, 44.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 57.

<sup>32</sup> Nanko-Fernandez, *Theologizing en Espanglish*, Kindle Locations 1243-1245.

because some words in Spanish have a deeper meaning when said in Spanish. For example, the words of *el Padre Nuestro* (*Our Father* prayer) have a richer meaning for a U.S. born Hispanic, evoking a personal connection to God. They offer a feeling of devotion and kindness. The *Our Father* in English does not evoke that for U.S. born Hispanics.

Theologizing in their vernacular language and culture aids the teens in grasping the message of formation about their faith. As in the example of Arturo, teens need to connect to the formation given them; therefore, catechists need to use words and phrases that will allow them to make connections. In the case of Hispanic teens, it is natural and even necessary to use Spanglish when explaining theological concepts. Just as Arturo connects more to *el Padre Nuestro*, other teens will connect to other concepts and practices if explained effectively in their own language. But formation also needs more than a cultural connection it needs exegetical work on Scripture and tradition in order to be effective, and to be connected to other sources other than faith only. Pope Francis reminds the Church about its responsibility for proclaiming the Gospel, by “proclaiming it to professional scientific and academic circles ... an encounter between faith, reason and the sciences with a view to developing new approaches and arguments on the issue of credibility ... would encourage greater openness to the Gospel.”<sup>33</sup>

Theologian Justo Gonzalez also adds another form of support to aid in the catechetical promotion of the Kingdom of God, a central concept in Christian tradition. In his book *Mañana*, Gonzalez presents the term *Reignese*, to demonstrate the concept of announcing the Kingdom of God. He says, “If we truly believe that our future is in the Reign of God, we shall start practicing *Reignese*.”<sup>34</sup> Promoting the Kingdom of God helps us embrace the idea of inclusion of diversity, but it does not associate that diversity with language and culture only - it’s a much larger scope.

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<sup>33</sup> Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel: Evangelii Gaudium: Apostolic Exhortation*, (2013), No. 132.

<sup>34</sup> Justo, L. González, *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1990), 167.

Gonzalez presents the concept of truly knowing the meaning of the Reign of God, in order help people understand, live and breathe the Reign of God in today's world. *Reignese* is an invitation to apply what God desires for humanity. For example, *Reignese* might encourage some people to volunteer in a Soup Kitchen to help others (love thy neighbor), while for others it might imply to simply begin to empathize with one's parents (also love thy neighbor). *Reignese* is a promotion and an invitation, which is important to pass on to Hispanic teens since they continue to struggle to find a place to *fit in* with two cultures.

Hispanic teens seek and need to be included in a community, but one that is connected to their own culture as teens and mestizo people. "Culture provides a sense of belonging to a community, a feeling of entitlement, the energy to face everyday adversities, and a rationale for resistance to a larger world in which members of minority groups feel like aliens in spite of being citizens."<sup>35</sup> Belonging to a community provides a space of their own. "What [is strived for] is not sameness but points of intersection that allow to engage."<sup>36</sup> Teens yearn for a way to be acknowledged as people, not necessarily blend into a group of people. "Latino/as have managed to develop new cultures and identities that juggle, blur, and blend the historic and cultural genealogies that make their heritage into a meaningful experience."<sup>37</sup> Emphasis on mestizaje in Hispanic theology "attest to an emerging Latino consciousness that is willing to explore anew significance of cultural hybridity both within the community and in the broader national context."<sup>38</sup> A way to embrace and acknowledge the cultural hybridity is to acknowledge that Hispanic teens have a different culture and they belong to the Universal Church. For example, since a number of Hispanic teens attend mass in Spanish with their parents, but do not connect to it because they see it as boring, the least thing to do is for the celebrant to say the

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<sup>35</sup> Flores and Benmayor, *Latino Cultural Citizenship*, 43.

<sup>36</sup> Nanko-Fernandez, *Theologizing en EspanGLISH*, Kindle Locations 517-519.

<sup>37</sup> Valentin, *Mapping Public Theology*, 47.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 48.

Homily in English or even Spanglish and use events that are relevant to today's youth. Teens need to be connected to the liturgy and the larger Church in order to feel accepted and connected to the Universal Church. In the words of Richard Gula, "We experience the call to ministry within the life of community, which is an agent of God's call; our vocation; is to serve the community; and the community sustains us in our vocation."<sup>39</sup>

## **The Church**

"The Church's pastoral ministry exists to sustain the work of the Gospel. One way it does is by nourishing and strengthening lay men and women in their calling and identity as people of faith, as contributors to the life and work of the Church, and as disciples whose mission is to the world."<sup>40</sup> Church is a medium and a place where the faithful go to enrich their faith. Canon 774 refers to faith formation, where parents are responsible to form their children by word and example in faith and in the practice of Christian life. Yet, formation needs to be coherent in accordance with the values of the larger Church.

In order for the local church community to be helpful in faith formation for immigrant Hispanic families, it needs to come into conversation and connection with Hispanic parents. The local church community needs to understand where the parents are coming from, their culture, and their faith in order to teach and lead parents to speak *Reignese* to their children. It is crucial for the local church community to become aware of the reality of the parents, and minister their needs, to then teach how to listen to their children and help them guide them. One way to connect with the Hispanic culture is through connections to *lo cotidiano*.

The God of Latino/a Catholics is one who is encountered in the very warp and weft of everyday life, in what Hispanic theologians have called "lo cotidiano" (the everyday). For Latino/a Catholics, our faith is ultimately made credible by our everyday relationship with a God whom we can touch and embrace, a God with

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<sup>39</sup> Richard M. Gula, *Just Ministry: Professional Ethics for Pastoral Ministers* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2010), 17.

<sup>40</sup> *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us: A Pastoral Plan for Adult Faith Formation in the United States*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Catholic Conference, 1999), §3.

whom we can weep or laugh, a God who infuriates us and whom we infuriate, a God whose anguished countenance we can caress and whose pierced feet we can kiss.<sup>41</sup>

*Lo cotidiano* makes God reachable. For example, perceiving God's presence in someone's smile or knowing that after a frustrating day one can express frustration to God. *Lo cotidiano* is a way to stay connected at all time with God, in the happy, depressed, and irritated moments. God is not present only in church.

### **Leadership**

In the case of St. Teresa, the church leadership such as the pastor, Hispanic Ministry and Youth Ministry could be a bridge between the larger world Church and the home church. Even though the Church is much larger, involving the baptized, priests, dioceses, and the Bishop of Rome, in order to offer a more concise analytical awareness, it is best to focus locally with the leadership closest to the particular families mentioned.

The pastor, as the head of the parish needs to be aware of what his community undergoes. Corresponding to this, the parish Youth Ministry ought to be conscious of their teenagers' context in order to better respond to their needs. Lastly, Hispanic Ministry should be involved and integrated because both the teens and parents are Hispanic. All three leadership roles are the core leaders of ministry that will meet the needs of these Hispanic families. Each group has a Catholic identity of their own that is to be respected, especially in the case of the teens. In turn, the parents' awareness must encompass their children's needs in order to assist in their process of defining and embracing their own Catholic identity. In this process, parents will be sensitive to

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<sup>41</sup> Roberto Goizueta, *Making Christ Credible*, in *Practicing Catholic: Ritual, Body, and Contestation in Catholic Faith* ed. Bruce T. Morrill, Joanna E. Ziegler, and Susan Rodgers (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 175-176.



not enforce their own identity to their children, but instead help them become aware of the beauty of their own Catholic identity as *mestizaje*.

### **Pastoral Care**

One step to help parents evaluate their children's needs is through pastoral care (looking after the well-being of others). "It is a proper and grave duty especially of pastors of souls to take care of the catechesis of the Christian people so that the living faith of the faithful becomes manifest and active through doctrinal instruction and the experience of Christian life."<sup>42</sup> By connecting pastoral care with faith formation, ministry instills a sense of a warm outreach. It welcomes people, rather than commands. According to Carmen Nanko-Fernandez:

Care remains a defining characteristic of pastoral ministry. How care is understood is open to interpretation, and this is reflected in the variety of constructions across Christian denominations. In the Roman Catholic tradition, *cura animarum* (care of souls) is intertwined with a sacramental dimension. In light of contemporary challenges facing sacramental ministry, present circumstances call for a shift from models that focus on the minister, usually ordained, as provider of care, to ministry as a network of caring professionals and resources. In turn, the local faith community becomes a locus of care, not just a collection of supplicants in need."<sup>43</sup>

Referring back to the initial needs of the parents as immigrants, their turn to the Church was not only a connection to their culture, but also a place where they knew would care for them.

According to the 1999 pastoral plan from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us* §5, the central task of catechesis is "adult faith formation, by which people consciously grow in the life of Christ through experience, reflection, prayer, and study..."<sup>44</sup> Parents, as immigrants, understand the church to be a central location to continue their ongoing process to practice their faith. The love parents have for their children can be a mediator for the church to use in helping families clarify how to transmit an *agape* love to

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<sup>42</sup> *Code of Canon Law*, c. 773.

<sup>43</sup> Nanko-Fernandez, *Theologizing en Espanish*, Kindle Locations 1480-1484.

<sup>44</sup> *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*, §5.

each other through faith formation among both groups. An example of care for others or care for neighbor is through the parable of *The Good Samaritan* (Lk. 12:25-37). *The Good Samaritan* tells the story of a man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho, who was robbed of everything in his traveling. The man was left on the road to die, while a number of people passed without offering any help. The last person to pass was a Samaritan man (considered low class people by Jews), yet he was the only person out of everyone else to show mercy by taking care of the wounded man. Parents need to see their children as human beings. Their children *are* their neighbors who also need attention and care. Neighbor is someone besides oneself, including one's children. Attention and care does not only emphasize on the essential physical needs of survival, i.e. food, water, clothing, and housing. It also requires to grow spiritually and intellectually; therefore, faith formation and education are part of a human being's needs.

### **Church, Parents, and Mestizos**

“Study after study shows that Catholics who attend church weekly or almost weekly are distinctly more knowledgeable about their faith and committed to the church. And the children of Catholics who attend Mass regularly are far more apt to practice their faith than children of infrequent attenders.”<sup>45</sup> However, among Hispanic teens, it is more than worship and attending Mass; it is the appropriation of their own faith in their *mestizaje* as Hispanics born in the U.S. They look for insights in search of their identity and belonging. “Hispanic young people are crucial for the present and the future of U.S, Catholicism. The catechesis of young Latinos today will influence the shape of vocations to the priesthood, religious life, and lay ecclesial ministry tomorrow.”<sup>46</sup> Vocations and lay ecclesial ministry are important, but it is more important to have

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<sup>45</sup> Peter Steinfels, *A People Adrift: The Crisis of the Roman Catholic Church in America* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks) 167.

<sup>46</sup> Matovina, *Latino Catholicism*, 222.

Catholics who understand and love their faith, and not have pews full of people who only follow a custom.

“We become fully human when we become more than human, when we let God bring us beyond ourselves in order to attain the fullest truth of our being. Here we find the source and inspiration of all our efforts at evangelization.”<sup>47</sup> In the case of St. Teresa, this is a way to pass on the faith to the younger generations, for the continuance of future Catholic generations. “As they begin to surpass their parents’ and grandparents’ often limited education, young Latinos need catechesis that engages their minds as well as their hearts...they need formation in Catholic faith and teachings that both addresses [the reality they live in] and builds on their elders’ religious traditions.”<sup>48</sup> As mentioned in the previous section, “Mestizaje of the Mexican-Americans,” formation needs to be presented in a manner that is relevant to the audience. For example, teens will not relate to stories or content that deals with suffering connected to a bygone immigrant homeland – it’s not part of their reality. They too search for points of connections to their Hispanic Catholic faith.

### **For Parents Only- Adult Faith Formation**

“From the beginning, [early communities of Jesus’ followers] were aware that ministry occurred in the accompaniment of individuals and communities within daily living.<sup>49</sup> Taking this into consideration, early communities understood the meaning of ministry. They incorporated the concept of *lo cotidiano* within their way of doing ministry. “The focus on *lo cotidiano* has tended to favor a more positive or even hopeful interpretation of daily living, including that living which is marked by struggle and marginalization.<sup>50</sup> Adapting *lo cotidiano* to faith formation can be helpful for ministering to the needs of both the Hispanic parents and their children. Eventually,

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<sup>47</sup> Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel*, no. 8.

<sup>48</sup> Matovina, *Latino Catholicism*, 243.

<sup>49</sup> Nanko-Fernandez, *Theologizing en Espanglish*, Kindle Locations 1475-1476.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, Kindle Locations 637-638.

faith formation for the parents can lead to a *catequesis familiar*, which encompasses formation for the adults, to then do the same with their children.

Parents are a key element for generations to live their faith. “In addition to catechizing and proclaiming aspects of *didache* alive in the church’s work ...teaching is also the act of reinterpreting, questioning, analyzing, and even at times rejecting and resisting.”<sup>51</sup> By parents adapting, and not manipulating the teachings of the Church, they can have a clearer notion of their own faith. In this case, if the parents manage to incorporate faith formation and *lo cotidiano* in accordance to their children’s reality, it is more likely the teachings will have a richer and relevant meaning to the children. However, in order to adapt *lo cotidiano* within faith formation, parents need to know what the reality of their children is. Otherwise, formation can lead to the problem of irrelevant faith among Hispanic families, which can lead to “inadequate and faulty formation [that] harms rather than helps the mission of the Church.”<sup>52</sup> The local church community, as the care taker, can be the bridge needed to help the parents connect to their children and vice-versa. “If we wish to lead a dignified and fulfilling life, we have to reach out to others and seek their good,”<sup>53</sup> teens included.

### **Love of Neighbor**

Love of neighbor is not only about the poor, the marginalized, the hungry, people in third world countries, but people other than oneself, including parents and children – as previously mentioned. Returning to the parable of *The Good Samaritan*, its lesson focuses on care for others which is an excellent model for families’ vocation to care for one another. In the words of Pope Francis, “In fidelity to the example of the Master, it is vitally important for the Church today to

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<sup>51</sup> Maria Harris, *Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 116.

<sup>52</sup> *Co-workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*, 34.

<sup>53</sup> Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel*, no. 9.

go forth and preach the Gospel to all: to all places, on all occasions, without hesitation, reluctance or fear. The joy of the Gospel is for all people: no one can be excluded.”<sup>54</sup>

Care for others is part of the baptismal call, especially for parents - they chose to care for others than themselves. However, parents are not necessarily at fault for being unable to recognize their own children as their ‘neighbors;’ the fault is in great part to the theology that has been passed from the Church. For example, the faith instilled from generations past comes from the *abuelitas* (grandmothers). The theology they passed is overly simple and full of traditions and customs. However, many of the traditions and customs have lost their meaning once inherited, and for the most part those who continue to practice the customs do it as a hollow tradition. One example is the celebration of *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* (Our Lady of Guadalupe celebration) on December 12<sup>th</sup>. Masses of people attend mass that day and even dress their children as *inditos* (little indigenous people from Mexico). My parents did the same to me. I asked parents, including my own mother, why they dress children up and attend mass that day. The common answer is *we celebrate our Holy Mother*. Although an array of interpretations exists for Our Lady of Guadalupe I chose to focus on one of Virgilio Elizondo’s, which describes *Guadalupe* as a symbol of liberation for the oppressed and marginalized Mexican indigenous peoples from the Spanish *conquistadores* (conquerors).<sup>55</sup> Guadalupe’s appearance to the *inditos* helped them regain their human dignity, it was never meant to glorify Guadalupe. However, our communities have lost understanding of this radical humanization of a people who were considered another, celebrating *Guadalupe* on December 12<sup>th</sup> not as a symbol of liberation but rather only celebrate a custom.

Faith formation can change the perspective from the way people have been catechized in the past. The key element to continue passing on the faith, as well as practicing it, is formation.

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<sup>54</sup> Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel*, no. 23.

<sup>55</sup> Elizondo, *Galilean Journey*, 44.

In August 4, 2002, the Congregation for the Clergy published the document *Instruction: The Priest, Pastor and Leader of the Parish Community*, signed and approved by the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II. The document itself addresses all priests involved in the *cura animarum*, including the responsibilities appointed to the parish pastor to care for the community including duties of teaching, preaching the Word, and administering the sacraments.<sup>56</sup> Even though the pastor is the head of the parish, as mentioned earlier, he is to empower the other leadership roles needed to minister to the proper needs of the community, i.e. Youth Ministry and Hispanic Ministry. As the head of a parish, it is proper for him to work in collaboration with others. “In the service of that community, [the pastor] may discharge the duties of teaching, sanctifying and governing, with the cooperation of other priests or deacons and the assistance of the lay members of the faithful and in accordance with the norms of law.”<sup>57</sup>

Working in community alleviates the burden for one, as well as delegates responsibility to others – making them accountable. Working with immigrant parents to teach their children to embrace their faith as mestizos requires the work of community. “No one is saved by himself or herself, individually, or by his or her own efforts. God attracts us by taking into account the complex interweaving of personal relationships entailed in the life of a human community. [These] people which God has chosen and called are the Church. Jesus did not tell the apostles to form an exclusive and elite group.”<sup>58</sup>

According to Catholic Social Teaching, “The family is recognized as the basic unit of society, where the values of the social teachings of the church are affirmed and taught.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> John Paul II, "Instruction: The Priest, Pastor and Leader of the Parish Community" (2002), accessed Jun 5, 2015, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccclergy/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccclergy\\_doc\\_20020804\\_istruzione-presbitero\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccclergy/documents/rc_con_ccclergy_doc_20020804_istruzione-presbitero_en.html).

<sup>57</sup> *Code of Canon Law*, c. 519.

<sup>58</sup> Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel*, no. 113.

<sup>59</sup> Kevin E. McKenna, *A Concise Guide to Catholic Social Teaching* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2002), 42.

However, “when Catholic families, parishes schools, and youth ministries don’t provide formation that takes into account young Latinos’ background and life situation, they are more likely to become adherents of moralistic therapeutic deism...or progressively detached from any religious practice or tradition.”<sup>60</sup> The church needs to be a bridge between teens and parents to help them encounter their Catholic identities; however, in order to begin a conversation with the parents, they need to become aware their children have needs and those needs are in relation to their teens’ way of life and the reality teens encounter every day. “When parents stay in a bubble, they are unable to see the world their children live in.”<sup>61</sup>

### **Acompañamiento**

In addition to helping parents look beyond their bubble to reach their children, the church can also offer the support of solidarity through an *acompañamiento*. Roberto S. Goizueta, says in his book *Caminemos con Jesus: Toward a Hispanic/ Latino Theology of Accompaniment*, “The God who accompanies is in return accompanied, and this process of *acompañamiento* occurs in the very situated contexts of particular *vidas cotidianas*...God accompanies and is accompanied— in the *imago Dei* of *nuestros vecinos*, our neighbors y de *nuestro/as compañero/as* [peers].”<sup>62</sup> An accompaniment provides the support to the immigrant people who are in mourning for their dramatic change and process of adaptation. Accompaniment also supports Hispanic immigrants in transition to adapt to a new community. Because the Hispanic immigrant holds on to his or her Catholic roots, having the local church as a support can help alleviate resistance to new cultures, including the *mestizaje* of their children. Similar to the experience of the Israelites’ exile from Egypt in the Book of Exodus, the Hispanic immigrant of today relates to the exiled community from Egypt. For the Israelites, their journey included the

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<sup>60</sup> Matovina, *Latino Catholicism*, 243.

<sup>61</sup> Olivia Cornejo, interview.

<sup>62</sup> Roberto S. Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesus: Toward a Hispanic/ Latino Theology of Accompaniment* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 16, quoted in Nanko-Fernandez, *Theologizing en Espanish*, Kindle Locations 1113-1115.

accompaniment of God. Hispanic parents also need that support. As mentioned in the beginning of section III, most first immigrant parents arrive to the U.S. with nothing - no friends, no community, and possibly no other family members. One of the first things immigrant families will search for will be community, in search of moral support and a community to belong to. Immigrant Hispanic parents look for a connection to their Catholic identity.

“Catholic identity, [as Jerome] Baggett implies, is not a fixed thing, and parishes adjust accordingly. They offer the opportunity not only to be part of a Catholic community but part of a particular kind of Catholic community.”<sup>63</sup> However, when children do not adopt the same Catholic identity as their parents, this does not make them any less children of their parents, or any less Hispanic, or any less Catholic. Parents need to stop confusing their children’s ethnicity with their children’s culture. Section II (Social Context) presents this common problem of culture vs ethnicity among Hispanic parents. Teens are taken to sacramental preparation in Spanish in order to maintain their culture, when in fact speaking Spanish has nothing to do with embracing one’s culture. Hispanic teens will always be Hispanic – it’s their ethnicity. They will never lose it. However, their culture is different from the Hispanic parents. Referring back to the use of Spanglish, teens do not hold Spanish as their primary language. They speak English and Spanglish. Parents need to acknowledge their children do not live in the parents’ home country; therefore, the reality is different – including the way teens receive faith formation. However, parents cannot help their children with faith formation on their own nor give the responsibility wholly to the local church community. “No longer is it enough to leave the work of the church to pastors and ordained leaders...we are a people called by the gospel, called to make a difference in our world.”<sup>64</sup> Parents and all who the baptized are called to share God’s love.

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<sup>63</sup> Hoover, *The Shared Parish*, Kindle Locations 2851-2852.

<sup>64</sup> Harris, *Fashion Me a People*, 24.



Faith formation does not belong to one specific group, as mentioned earlier in the *Code of Canon Law* c. 774, “Solicitude for catechesis belongs to all members of the Church.”<sup>65</sup> Even though the parents are the primary caretakers to their children, community is also an important aspect of the process of formation. Parents may be the first catechists; however, the parents need guidance and support to be effective catechists to help their children develop a sound relationship with their faith. “The pastor (*parochus*) is the proper pastor of the parish entrusted to him, exercising the pastoral care of the community committed to him under the authority of the diocesan bishop in whose ministry of Christ he has been called to share.”<sup>66</sup> Yet both church leaders and parents also need to acknowledge that Hispanic children of today are mestizo; thus, they need to explore faith through their mestizaje. Part of the Hispanic cultural identity is to celebrate one’s own heritage, for teens who were born in the U.S. this means celebrating their mixed (mestizo) identity.

Building on the idea of how early communities of Jesus’ followers operated, discussed in section III (For Parents Only - Adult Faith Formation), the concepts applied such as *lo cotidiano*, *acompañamiento*, and faith formation are starting points for Hispanic families. The process provides encouragement to adapt to their new surroundings, as well as see the needs of their children, thus leading to accept they are not one hundred percent Mexican, Salvadorian, or Guatemalan - they are Mexican-American, Salvadorian-American, Guatemalan-American. Therefore, a shift of Catholic identities has occurred, and the faith brought by immigrant parents to the U.S. is not relevant to the mestizos of the U.S. Parents as first immigrants may relate better to the Old Testament with the people of Israel exiled from Egypt; however, Hispanic-U.S. born teens may relate better to the New Testament with Jesus as a Jew in Galilee. The parents, as the Israelites, come from a world of exile and relocation. The U.S.-born teens, like Jesus, struggle to

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<sup>65</sup> *Code of Canon Law*, c. 774.

<sup>66</sup> *Code of Canon Law*, c. 519.

be accepted by the dominant culture as U.S. citizens who also belong to the U.S. Both groups, parents and teens, are correct as far as their connection to their respective Catholic identities, yet parents as the first caretakers are responsible to guide their children in their needed formation, and not manipulate it.

In conclusion, the topics discussed in sections I, II, and III deal with cultural gaps between Hispanic immigrant parents and U.S. born/raised teens. Part of the cultural gaps is due to the parents' lack of understanding of the needs of their own children. Faith formation that ministers to parents is not the faith formation their children need. Teens have a different reality compared to their parents; therefore each group has different needs. In order to support first immigrant parents pass on a sound faith formation to their children. Section IV will discuss a plan for parents and teens to receive faith formation at their respective levels, thus helping parents help their teens learn about and embrace their Catholic identity as Hispanic-American mestizos.

#### **IV. Plan Component**

First generation Hispanic immigrant families attending St. Teresa Church are in need of support for faith formation by helping their children embrace their Catholic identity and mestizaje. The parish is looked as a common ground to receive the support needed for the families. The key players in the development as representatives of the larger Church are the pastor, Youth Ministry director, and Hispanic Ministry director. The people in need are the Hispanic parents and their U.S. born and/or raised children.

#### **Where to Begin**

The issue between parents and teens is that teens find their parents' faith irrelevant. In contrast, the parents do not know how to pass their faith to their children, and do the same as *their* parents who passed the faith to them. In order to create a common ground for both groups

to begin a conversation, I propose the following steps (inspired by the works of *Co-Workers in the Vineyard*, Maria Harris's *Fashion Me a People* and Richard Gula's *Just Ministry*) as starting points to form bridges between parents, children and the larger Church:

- 1) Create a *Safe Space* for teens.
- 2) Divide and form an agenda for each of the groups (teens and parents).
- 3) Define the structure of the church leadership to oversee the formation for parents and teens.

### **1. Creating a Safe Space for Teens**

Safe Space is for teens, ages 13 to 17 in Middle School and High School, to engage with their faith on their own. This requires an actual room or location where they can meet every week while their parents are in their own group gathering. The safe space is a place where teens can ask questions about their faith, current events, and other information they inquire about. Teens are given the opportunity to share with their peers about interests and even questions about their faith that they have in common as teens without having to worry about someone telling them what they *should* do or believe. As mentioned before, teens have their own culture, this includes their own language as well. Even though teens might consider English as their primary language, they also speak Spanglish (Spanish mixed with English). The safe space allows teens to express themselves in the language they prefer; therefore, it is important to have a leadership who understands the language, and can speak it. People who do not relate to the language and culture will not engage with teens as effectively as those who can. The idea of a safe space is not to have cumulative formation, but a space for teens to express themselves in their local church community about their idea of *Church*. Since the space is for teens and is about questions or interests *they* have, they will propose most of the topics and activities they want to hear or do during the meetings.

## **Space for Parents**

Aside from the space for teens, parents also need a space to gather. Since some of the parents are already involved in one or multiple activities within the same parish, it is not ideal to add another day to meet or another activity to do. They have full agendas of ministry and other activities. The object for the space for parents is to create a place where the needs of the family can be assessed by the parents themselves to form community at home. Moreover, separate gatherings (parents away from teens) offers the parents a space to express themselves freely.

Parents already know and practice community in their own adult group. The idea to gather with the parents is to form a similar sense of community to implement at home. In order to help teens have a sense of community within the local church community and home, parents need to be able to model what community looks like.

## **2. Agenda for the Parents**

Working with the parents will require working with the agenda of the adult group gatherings where they attend with their families. Since they bring their teens with them already, the teens will take this time to attend their own group while their parents gather with their weekly group. However, in order for parents to connect with their children and assess their teens' needs I propose for parents, whose children attend the teen group, to meet every two months. Since parents cannot be in two places at once, it will require to work with the adult group leadership to schedule bi-monthly meetings; hence, not conflict with group events. For example, certain dates can be programmed to hold parent meetings and not schedule parents to participate during adult group gatherings. Instead of the parents going to their group, they would attend the parent gathering. This will not or should not be the implementation of another program or another activity to add to what families already work, but work with what already exists.

## Topics for Parents

An issue that is not spoken or acknowledged very much is the topic of *mestizaje*. As mentioned in section III, *mestizaje* deals with a multiple belonging – living in more than one culture at once, i.e. Mexican-Americans. In my parish experience, the topic of *mestizaje* is not spoken or acknowledged much. Neither parents nor teens embrace this concept, yet it is an important topic to discuss. Teens born/raised in the U.S. are *mestizos* living in two cultures. Examples discussed in sections II and IV of the shifts Hispanic teens deal with are illustrations of their reality which I believe is worth to discuss with their parents. Some parents are not aware or do not acknowledge the culture their children live in. Bringing the idea to parents to speak about it and express themselves can help to begin a conversation about it. Exposing Virgilio Elizondo's concept of *mestizaje* to the parents would be a first step to begin a conversation with the parents to explore the sense of the teens' multiple belonging. Then introduce them to Jesus' *mestizaje* exposing Elizondo's intention to trace Jesus' "...sociocultural identity to draw an analogy between it and the Mexican American *mestizo/a* experience."<sup>67</sup>

A second needed concept to present and work with parents is *lo cotidiano*. This concept of *lo cotidiano*, discussed in section III with Carmen Nanko-Fernandez, is perceiving God in the common and simple ways of the everyday life. For example, help teens to perceive God in school with peers, friends, and through the love their parents have for them. *Lo cotidiano* integrated to formation makes formation more significant –because people can relate to it. Another example is the use of Spanglish among teens. Spanglish is part of *lo cotidiano* to a number of Hispanic youth. Helping parents allow their children to express themselves in Spanglish, as well as not allow others to ridicule them for speaking their language, is another way for parents to connect more with their teens. Furthermore, *lo cotidiano* is a graspable

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<sup>67</sup> Valentin, *Mapping Public Theology*, 57.

concept for both parents and teens, to make God part of their everyday lives and not only see Him as someone who is in church or is with people who are pious. God is also present in the people and events encountered every day. “We live out of the relationships that make up our lives, especially relationships with those who are significant in our lives. This begins with the crucial influence of our parents and family and continues as a permanent call to ministry beyond the hierarchy...God calls us through us.”<sup>68</sup>

### **3. Structure of Church Leadership**

Leadership is key, which calls for prepared adults. Even if it’s a small group of core leaders, they need to have a sound faith formation. Leaders also need to understand the Hispanic immigrant culture, and the Hispanic-American *mestizaje*, in order to speak, understand, and help families come together. *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord* dedicates an entire chapter (Formation for the Lay Ecclesial Ministry) to the complete formation of the human being. The leaders are called to continue growing in their faith formation: Human Formation, Spiritual Formation, Intellectual Formation, Pastoral Formation, and Ongoing Formation.<sup>69</sup> As *Co-Workers* suggests, formation in different aspects of the human being are important. A sound formation for leadership definitely helps leaders form others – in this case teens and parents. The goal is to help families become strong families in their faith; therefore, not only should both groups be fed through their physical, intellectual, and spiritual needs, but recognize that the needs of the human being are broader. Parents and teens are also called to form community with the Universal Church (thy neighbor), as well as continue to grow with ongoing formation. “Ongoing formation, which strengthens ministerial identity as well as enhancing ministerial

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<sup>68</sup> Gula, *Just Ministry*, 18.

<sup>69</sup> *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005), 33-53.

skills, is not a luxury to be pursued when time and resources allow, but is rather a permanent necessity for every ecclesial minister, lay or ordained.”<sup>70</sup>

### **Recruitment**

“God calls us through the church. While we may be accustomed to interpreting Church as the hierarchy that officially sanctions our call to ministry, we need to think more communally of the Church as the whole people of God sharing in this role of calling forth ministers to serve the mission of the Church.”<sup>71</sup> In order to have a leadership as the head of these groups, the church leadership needs to determine who qualifies. Good intentions are not enough to lead the groups. Strong foundations such as the formation previously presented by *Co-Workers* are needed in order to guide others. In this case, again, the pastor, youth ministry director, and Hispanic ministry director (united) are responsible to assign the leadership positions to people. However, in my experience in ministry, it is best to have only one person oversee the formation and implementation of the group of teens and parents. In my observations, the best candidate is a Hispanic ministry leader. Multiple leadership is not the best model and will cause confusion among the core leadership (once chosen), as well as the groups themselves (parents and teens). It is better to only have one supervisor, instead of multiple. Additionally, the Hispanic ministry director understands the vision and realities of the Hispanic parents and children.

### **Other Considerations**

Parents may still be in a process of mourning over leaving their home country, as were the Israelites when exiled; on the other hand, teens continue to battle a process of acceptance with the dominant Anglo culture in their own country as *mestizos* – just as Jesus did in his home in Galilee.

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<sup>70</sup> *Co-Workers*, 51.

<sup>71</sup> Gula, *Just Ministry*, 17.

Leadership in the Anglo community does not understand the reality of Hispanic teens. It is difficult for the dominant culture to relate to the Hispanic immigrant community because the culture itself is multicultural. Parents have one culture and the U.S. born/raised teens have another. The vision to help each group does not lie in the hands of the dominant Anglo culture. Unless the dominant culture understands the parents and teens, the intentions to help will only frustrate those who are trying to help because they will not understand how to help. In my experience, I have observed that youth ministries (run by the Anglo community) do not understand the concept of ministering to immigrant families – it is not a matter of translating from English to Spanish, but a matter of relating to each of the groups, speaking the same language, and shifting between one generation and/or group to another.

Lastly, parents do not differentiate between ethnicity and culture, as mentioned in section II. This is problematic for teens because they are faced with formation that is not relevant. Parents do not acknowledge their children have a different culture than they, and try for their children to maintain their ethnicity as much as possible instead of catering to the needs of the teens' culture.

The issues discussed above need to be present in the leaders' mind and curriculum at every meeting in order to relate a sound faith formation to both, teens and parents. According to the *Code of Canon Law* c. 774, "Parents above others are obliged to form their children by word and example in faith and in the practice of Christian life; sponsors and those who take the place of parents are bound by an equal obligation."<sup>72</sup> Leaders who come in contact with these families, as baptized, are responsible to share the Catholic faith. A good starting point to renovate the church of today.

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<sup>72</sup> *Code of Canon Law*, c.774.



In conclusion, I have presented a common problem within the Hispanic community, specifically with first generation immigrant parents. This group deals with cultural gaps between the parents and their U.S. born/raised children, causing their children to lose sense of their Catholic identity. In section I, I provided a case study of what the gaps look like using St. Teresa Church as an example. Then I moved to section II, providing findings of how the gaps, if not addressed, affect families and the larger Church, and why it is important to turn focus to provide sound faith formation to parents and children. In section III, I discussed theological concepts that address the gaps between parents and children, and explored what the Catholic Tradition says about the responsibility parents and the church leadership have through the baptismal call. Lastly, section IV discusses a plan to start bridging gaps between parents, children, and the local church.

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